

Allowing Hidalgo County Court at Law judges to practice law in federal courts

HB 3181 by Muñoz (Lucio)

DIGEST:	HB 3181 would have allowed Hidalgo County Court at Law judges to practice law in federal courts until January 1, 2005.
GOVERNOR'S REASON FOR VETO:	"House Bill 3181 proposes to allow sitting Hidalgo County Court at Law judges to practice law in federal courts. There are potential conflicts of interest inherent in allowing sitting judges to practice law. Furthermore, this practice contributes to a backlog of cases in county courts. The reason for allowing this practice was that the judges of county courts at law were not highly paid; however, with judges salaries at current levels, this is no longer an issue."
RESPONSE:	<p>Rep. Sergio Muñoz, the author of HB 3181, said: "This bill would have allowed county court at law judges in Hidalgo County to practice law in federal court and to afford to take a pay cut, which would have gone to fund the new warrant center. The warrant center would have given the sheriff the resources to issue warrants and address the court 'no shows' that are the cause of the court case backlog.</p> <p>"The judges practiced law in all courts until the end of 1994, and there has never been a complaint about a conflict-of-interest. The judges have the highest integrity and would not place themselves in a position to be in conflict-of-interest. The savings from the pay cut would have funded the warrant center and decreased the backlog of cases in the county. The governor's veto will only serve to increase the backlog and by 1997 the backlog will be much greater."</p> <p>Sen. Eddie Lucio, the bill's sponsor, said: "This legislation would have provided an extension that would have permitted county court at law judges to practice law in federal courts and the county court a law judges would have relinquished a recent pay raise that was granted when the expiration for this statute ran out. This bill would have saved Hidalgo County about \$120,000 per year."</p>
NOTES:	HB 3181 passed the House on the Local and Consent Calendar and was not analyzed in a <i>Daily Floor Report</i> .